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Culture et patrimoines équestres au Brésil : un potentiel inexploité pour un tourisme favorable au développement local ? L'étude de cas de São Luiz do Purunã

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Introduction

- 1 Brazil is one of the world's 'horse giants', listed on FAO records as the having the fourth largest equine population on the planet¹. Yet as a society, this nation, the largest on the South American continent, has only recently begun to reckon with its equestrian heritage – its historical weight, meanings and evolution, as a complex form of human-animal relationship, involving traditions as well as new social and cultural demands.
- 2 At the same time, Brazil is also a nation plagued with extreme social inequality, intimately linked to its colonial history, and in the more recent second half of the twentieth century, to complex and contradictory patterns that initially devalued the way of life of rural peoples, many of whom lost their traditional livelihoods and were forced to migrate to cities . The “flip side” to this story is that, over the course of the latter decades of the century, the middle classes, often very proud of their urban existence and culture, gained new purchase on the rural. The social and environmental “risks” of living in cities generated new interest in the countryside, now on the part of urban residents who enjoyed comfortable lives and disposable income, and could now

flock there, as “consumers of the rural.” Given the decline of family farming and a general unsettling of rural forms of existence, it is not surprising that the rural development debates of the latter decades of the century often pointed to tourism as an activity that could rescue economically depressed communities, providing jobs, and perhaps fostering socially and environmentally sound forms of development (Silva, 2019, p.10).

- 3 How do horses come into the picture? The answer may be somewhat evident, as horses continue to be a material and symbolic presence in Brazilian rurality, and – as I have often pointed out – even the suburban areas around major Brazilian cities are populated by them. Interestingly, at least one popular cultural movement – Gaúcho Traditionalism, born in mid-20th century in the Southern Brazilian city of Porto Alegre – took, as its point of departure, both the recognition of historic equestrian traditions and the anxieties of the moment regarding their fate, as “modernization” proceeded apace (Oliveira, 1996). Given this historical and contemporary significance, it seems logical to imagine that the horse, and equestrian cultures, would become protagonists of “new forms of consuming the rural” and the specifically “equestrian” forms of tourism, which have become part of a formal market since the 1990s (Junqueira, n/d). As a sociologist who has been studying diverse Brazilian equestrian milieu for over twenty years – including showjumping, racing and rodeo riding – I have long been concerned with the cultural meanings constructed within these worlds, and how their discourses and practices impact on humans, (re)shaping their relations to other (that is, non-human) animals, to nature, and to patterns of socio-economic relations. I have elsewhere asked, quite specifically, about the chances equestrian activities provide to men and women who seek to build professional lives within this universe, or to members of horse-oriented rural communities that struggle to deal with a rapidly changing world (Adelman and Costa, 2017).
- 4 The research I present in the following pages is the result of a new phase of my work on Brazilian equestrian milieu. It is the first of my studies to take the form of a case study of a particular community which both replicates the contradictory patterns of today’s “new ruralities” and stands proudly as a self-conscious example of Southern Brazilian horse-based culture. As a community that has also, for several decades, been drawn into a web of new endeavours to stimulate tourism in the region, it becomes an invaluable site for research, asking – and attempting an initial, albeit partial response to – questions regarding how Brazilian rural life is ‘repackaged’, by and for whom, through the marketing of local and regional equestrian culture. Which specific social actors and groups become involved in equestrian tourism, and how do the relations between them unfold? Do, or can these activities promote “community empowerment”, in terms that go beyond survival and toward the development of economic and social opportunities, particularly for rural youth? What role does the interest in equestrianism as heritage, and its connection to environmental preservation, play?

Theoretical and methodological foundations

- 5 The current work certainly inspired – and aspires to become a part of – new literature in a field we have referred to elsewhere as “equestrian social science” (Thompson & Adelman, 2017); it is also undergirded by theoretical perspectives of sociological origin and ethnographic or “participant observation” developed by anthropology and

sociology. With regard to the former, it must suffice here to make my alignment with sociological ‘conflict theories’ explicit – a shorthand, if not totally satisfactory way of referring to currents developed since the discipline’s classical days that seek to understand the disputes and struggles amongst people and groups in highly stratified modern societies. These are perspectives that enable us to understand the historical construction of social institutions and interest groups, stratification (particularly in terms of class, race and gender), theories of actors, networks and social action and of how experience ‘constructs subjects’ (Scott, 1991) in “macro” and “micro contexts”. Cultural theories also shape my work, fundamental in interrogating the “meanings of the horse” (Davis and Maurstad, 2015) within a particular part of the world, resuscitating the invaluable contribution of Hobsbawm and Ranger’s (2013) discussion of the ‘invention of tradition’.

- 6 And, moving closer to my particular object of study, there are fundamental and intersecting issues regarding (post) modernity and new ruralities, particularly as they pertain to Latin American realities (Brandenburg, 2018; Silva, 2019; Pires, 2007), necessary for an understanding of the broader context of the Brazilian rural community that I study. I give salience to the significant movement, as of the 1990s, for the ‘revalorisation’ of the rural (historically associated with “backwardness” and ruthlessly abandoned and/or preyed upon during the industrialisation phase known as the Brazilian economic miracle²) that invests in ‘pluriactivity’ and broadens meanings that were traditionally shaped by associating the countryside with peasant and other forms of agricultural economy. Actors in this process include the upper and middle classes as entrepreneurs and consumers of the rural, but also rural-based social movements that demand agrarian reform (such as the well-known MST, or Landless Peasants Movement) and environmentalists, who in their defence of the environment often engage not only with issues of the preservation of nature, but also of ‘traditional’ (peasant and indigenous) modes of existence seen as promoting more harmonious forms of living on, and “off” the land.
- 7 Regarding methodology, I note here my longstanding commitment to “participant observation” studies within particular field sites of Brazilian equestrianism. This is both a personal and an academic story, one which begins with my own lifelong love for horses and the discovery – when I moved from the USA to Brazil, in 1991 – that the country had a vibrant equestrian scene that would make it possible for me to return to a passion of my youth. Horses were everywhere! They were easily accessible from almost any neighbourhood of the city (a ten- or twenty-minute drive in any direction) and riding, except at the fancier equestrian centres for English-style riding, was easily affordable. Soon I discovered that it was also a fascinating universe of socio-anthropological study, and one that had, thus far, been largely ignored.
- 8 Many years later, when at the beginning of 2018 I decided to move my own horse, who was stabled closer to the city, to someplace further – someplace with access to trails and to nature –, São Luiz do Purunã, 60 kms from my home, seemed to be the perfect option. Although I had, at that point, no particular intention of turning the settlement into a “new object of study”, there was also no reason to assume that this would not happen. After all, it was initially my own leisure practice that had led me into a new field of study, starting me on a course that had now taken me from elite equestrian centre, to racetrack, to rodeo worlds. São Luiz do Purunã would, as it turned out, become “the frosting on the cake”!

- 9 Now, after two years of getting to know a wide range of people, from different walks of life, who live in or spend considerable amounts of time within this community of approximately 2,000 – and literally, “doing the trails” with many of them –, comes my first challenge to present reflections on this participant observation. This means revisiting hours and days of interaction with people from distinct walks of life and different relationships to the town, interactions that were sometimes on horseback, on trails or at stable grounds, but also at local restaurants, barbecues, shops, homes and even along roads. In the pages that follow, I will mention some of those who, through my ethnographic ventures, have appeared as key actors. These are members of the business community, of the local population (including men and boys who work with horses, women who clean and cook for hotels, and youth – girls and boys – whose social and leisure lives revolve around their equines) and of the NGO that has set up to work within the community, people with whom I have spoken often and sometimes developed friendships.
- 10 Initially, with regard to the local population, trust was something I had to win, and to build. As one stable owner commented to me, the local community tends to harbour ‘suspicion’ toward middle class ‘outsiders’ and perhaps even toward working class ‘newcomers’ (workers from other rural or semi-rural areas). Given the ongoing processes of influx of middle-class urbanites and land developers, this mistrust was something I could certainly understand. Nonetheless, my status as a ‘double outsider’ (urban woman *and* foreigner) seemed to facilitate things. I did not easily fit into any known category, and became somewhat of a curiosity – the lady with the foreign accent, who rode all over town, whether with others or on her own (the latter, an uncommon sight for a place where sole adult riders are still, almost always, male) and often, with camera in hand. In fact, since 2014, when I first took interest in Visual Anthropology, my Nikon 610 became another constant companion “in the field”, and photography became a new form not only of documentation, but of exchange with those I encountered in the field. In São Luiz, the local horsemen and horsewomen were always flattered by my request to include them in scenes or do their portraits, a situation which in many cases marked the beginning of relations of trust and friendship. I had something special to “give back”, in return for their time, and their own willingness to share.

State of the Art: Equestrianism and new ruralities in Brazil

- 11 As suggested above, Brazil has immense and diverse equestrian heritage. It is inherently linked to a history of working equines that evolved from the earliest Portuguese use and breeding of horses for military use in colonial control of territories (Camphora, 2017, p.130), to the employment of equines in extensive cattle ranching, while mules were favoured for traction and cargo. From the early mixture of Arabians, Barbs and Andalusians (Camphora, 2017, p.129) brought by the Portuguese and, in some cases, later processes of mixture and selective breeding, “native Brazilian breeds” emerged. Today, among the most significant are the gaited Mangalarga horse and Crioulo, descendants of the horses left to roam the pampas several centuries ago. These two breeds are actively fomented by prosperous breeders’ associations, although other popular non-native breeds include the Arabian, the Thoroughbred and the American

Quarter Horse. Representatives of the horse industry have, in recent years, been visible members and sometimes even lobbyists connected to other segments of the agrobusiness sector; linked to them are a number of active breeders' associations and specialised sectors of competition and sport, organised nationally or internationally. As in many other parts of the world, equine functions in sport and leisure are expanding, yet they do not replicate the 'from work to sport horse' model of European countries; in fact, in statistics disseminated in 2016 (Câmara Setorial de Equinocultura, 2016, p.20), approximately 3.9 million of Brazil's close to five million horses are engaged in the traditional sector of cattle ranching. In addition to these figures, horses are used for armed forces and police functions, as well as transport and traction, further reducing the proportion of exclusively "sporting" horses.

- 12 The continued association of horses with ranch work may be one of the factors contributing to the scant public recognition of equestrian sport alongside other forms of sporting practice³; hence, they tend to remain restricted to the expressed concern of smaller groups with vested economic and/or personal interests in the horse world. As in other parts of the world, therapeutic riding programs are a novelty, yet a growing one; they have gained some attention and public support, making recent headway through State recognition of its professionals and the services they provide.⁴ In some rural and semi-rural areas, municipal governments respond to the popularity of rodeo sport among their electorate, providing support to public rodeo facilities and arenas. Today, major metropolitan areas, as well as many smaller cities have not just one *hípica* – the name given to elite equestrian clubs for the practice of showjumping and dressage – but several, alongside which coexist popular equestrian practices, which often thrive at a much less formal level (e.g. informal rodeos and community equestrian traditions such as *cavalgadas* – rides, or sometimes pilgrimages) and even an 'informal equine economy' (e.g. barns that board horses, horse trading and services that lie outside formally accounted for economic exchanges) with large resonance in rural and semi-rural communities.
- 13 Equestrian tourism in Brazil is a recent activity, intricately linked to the growth of the equestrian sport and leisure sector and to new uses of the countryside by urban sectors⁵. Furthermore, in the eyes of its stakeholders, as well as in their characteristic forms of self-promotion⁶, it is intimately connected to people's enjoyment and appreciation of nature and the recognition and/or preservation of equestrian heritage. Yet Brazil lags behind other nations that have long written the 'heritage issue' into cultural policy – for example, the French triumph in garnering UNESCO recognition of its riding traditions as non-tangible heritage (Pickel-Chevalier, 2017) – an issue which in itself leads to reflections not only on culture but on the concerns and influence of social actors involved in the agrobusiness and sporting sectors of the horse world⁷. At the same time, there is at least one remarkable cultural movement linked to Brazilian popular equestrian tradition, the Gaucho Traditionalist Movement (*Movimento Tradicionalista Gaúcho* -MTG) mentioned above. It dates back to a group of young, middle class, rural men from the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, who, in the mid-20th century, found themselves estranged from the world of their origins, as students in the capital city of Porto Alegre. This triggered their efforts to preserve and promote the cultural traditions they associated with their roots and their upbringing (Oliven, 1996). Since then, this originally regionalist movement has spread throughout the country (and even to other parts of the world), maintaining the symbolic and practical cult of

the Crioulo horse as one of its prime axes, with a focus on the type of working equitation that is associated with it. The MTG and its local branches (called CTGs, or Centres for Gaucho Traditionalism) function in many communities, rural and urban, as cultural associations that foment Gaucho folklore and popular equestrian involvement (Adelman and Becker, 2013; Adelman and Camphora, 2020). Furthermore, rural communities throughout the country, whether or not engaged in rodeo activities, are known for the organisation and enjoyment of traditional rides – *cavalgadas* – often linked to religious festivities and patron saints.⁸

Illustration 1. A group of local riders and their guests on the trails in São Luiz do Purunã



Author's photo, 2019

- 14 It is precisely the profound embeddedness of horses in Brazilian popular culture that leads to my inquiries into why, within the context of today's "new ruralities", communities themselves would not be included in the "touristification" of equestrian activities in ways that can strengthen them and help preserve a popular heritage. Although community *cavalgadas* (rides which may take hours or days) and pilgrimages on horseback are a traditional practice that is still very much alive today, "equestrian tourism" as an organised business has but several decades of existence (Junqueira, n/d), most often through the systematising efforts of middle-class, urban entrepreneurs. It caters largely to upper, middle class Brazilians who have disposable income and equestrian preferences – and its entrepreneurs are also avid to capture the attention of greater numbers of foreigners, as potentially lucrative and capitalising on the fact that there is a more consolidated group of consumers for this kind of activity in Europe and North America.
- 15 Tourism entrepreneurs do not refrain from appropriating and 'repackaging' the roads, routes and trails that rural populations have long travelled on horseback⁹, and characteristically depend on the equestrian skills and willingness of local horsemen, that is, the knowledge, skills and availability of workers, largely male, who break in and train horses and carry out everyday stable chores. This generally occurs within a

framework of hierarchical managerial strategies, poor wages, and the tendency to use the informal labour of rural males of different ages, whose characteristically low educational levels label them as “unskilled” despite accumulated “equestrian capital” (Adelman and Costa, 2017). In other words, their equestrian skills are socially necessary, but not economically or professionally valorised.

- 16 Thus, my reflections in this text are guided by my perception that real material and symbolic recognition of Brazil’s intangible equestrian heritage and its popular actors, human and equine even, would be well-deserved. Equestrian tourism seems to harbour potential as part of such a project, to the extent that it has singular characteristics that may distinguish it from other forms of ‘heritage tourism’. For example, as Salazar and Zhu (2015) point out, it is seen primarily as an economic resource; its marketing, presentation and development tends to target “tourists instead of locals”, thus strengthening “the asymmetrical relationship which often leads to social and cultural conflicts” (p.245). Such risks may be counterbalanced in Brazilian communities such as São Luiz, where horses are arguably a ‘living cement’ that brings generations and genders together and the horses are considered or represented not only, nor primarily, as a commodity, but as a ‘live connection’ to a past, and a pleasure of the present. In other words, the symbolic and emotionally laden connection to an animal may outweigh more utilitarian factors and relational modes, and the shared bonds of attachment to equines, frequently acknowledged by equestrians around the world, may function as a somewhat eccentric shared value of both tourism service providers and clients. Although this may sound naïve or utopian¹⁰, my suggestion that equestrian heritage tourism might provide space for less asymmetrical or merely instrumental relations also takes inspiration from the Icelandic experience. A small Nordic country, that is also characterised by its strong, local “culture of horsemanship” (Helgadóttir and Sigurdóttir, 2008) has enjoyed the development of equestrian tourism as “lifestyle business”. In concrete terms, this has meant that, in the face of the dwindling of both farming and fishing, and their possibility to function as the sole sustenance of rural populations, equestrian tourism has been mobilised as a form of relief or remedy that has also allowed its agents to preserve their love for and identification with their equines. Furthermore, the niche that they have thus been able to occupy within the tourism market seems to attract horse lovers from around the world, who join them in appreciation for a leisure spent in the out-of-doors, privileging experience with other equestrians and equines, in a natural environment, over the glitzy comforts of foreign hotels, restaurants and nightlife. Given the similarly widespread horse culture among Brazilian rural folk, and the fact that, as of the 1990s, people of the countryside have sought ‘pluri-activity’ – engaging simultaneously in agricultural activities that are also supplemented by involvement in tourism, commercialisation of handicrafts and home-processed foods etc. –, resources for local communities’ positive involvement in equestrian tourism might seem to be on the order of the day. Yet the success, and even the desirability, of such endeavours also hinges upon our ability not only to imagine, but also to put into practice, a different model. A model in which the encounter between a rich, popular equestrian culture and the more conventional tourism entrepreneurs would be able to find common ground, shared goals, and help promote forms of leisure for urban and rural dwellers who share a taste or a passion for outdoor activity, animals, the countryside, and nature. I will now move on to examine a particular case in which these issues have come to the forefront.

Findings and discussion

São Luiz do Purunã: a popular equestrian culture in a process of touristification

- 17 São Luiz do Purunã, a small community, has experienced demographic growth. The most recent official data is already a decade old – from 2010, when there were 1,147 inhabitants¹¹. Townspeople with whom I spoke in 2019 referred regularly to population estimates in the vicinity of 2000. Located in between the state capital of Curitiba and Ponta Grossa, another major city, São Luiz has followed the path of many other rural communities that have been swept along in the wave of the new “hybridising” ruralities. A simple half-hour drive – or ride – around the main streets of the village and outlying areas make these trends easily discernible. One notes, for example, the overwhelming presence of cash crops – soy and corn, and perhaps forage for livestock – as well as the signs of land speculation, materialised in the plentiful number of real estate signs placed at the edge of a corn field or a pasture, amidst grazing cattle or Crioulo horses. There are large, elegantly-designed houses surging up, as if from nowhere, in the midst of what once may have been a farmer’s domain or even at the edge of the canyon – the latter exemplifying the private appropriation of public land, insofar as “no trespassing” signs, wooden gates and fences block access to the dramatic vistas of the environmental protection area.
- 18 Also conspicuous are the signs or banners of resorts and dude ranches that offer vacationers a weekend ‘taste of the country’ (illustration 2), featuring traditional southern Brazilian *churrasco* or the popular all-you-can-eat ‘home cooking’ buffets.

Illustration 2. A young urbanite enjoying horses and holiday



Author's photo, 2018

- 19 There is also a pricey spa featuring yoga and vegetarian cuisine tucked more securely off the beaten paths: the very face of the “new” service sector. These are businesses that cater to visitors and to the urban residents who have built stylish, even luxurious second residences alongside the canyons and rock outcroppings that have made the region famous. Although new businesses spring up from time to time, I have made a recent count of eight establishments that cater primarily to the “urban visitor” population. This includes: four hotel/resorts without horses and two that feature riding; one establishment that has a restaurant and pizzeria operating on the weekends and also boards horses and offers trail rides; two others that combine resort and riding facilities; and one barn which is exclusively a riding and training centre that also offers trail rides to eager outsiders.
- 20 Our real or imaginary tour of the district is never complete without at least one encounter with its most emblematic figure – a “gaúcho” riding a Crioulo horse, or even a mule, making his way along the unpaved roads that extend in several different directions, out into rural areas and settlements – and sometimes crossing highways (illustration 3). And in addition to the solitary gaucho, probably a small group or two of leisure riders, whether locals or visitors – in the latter case, probably led by a local guide.

Illustration 3. Local people and their guests suggest getting ready for a ride, in front of a locally-owned business

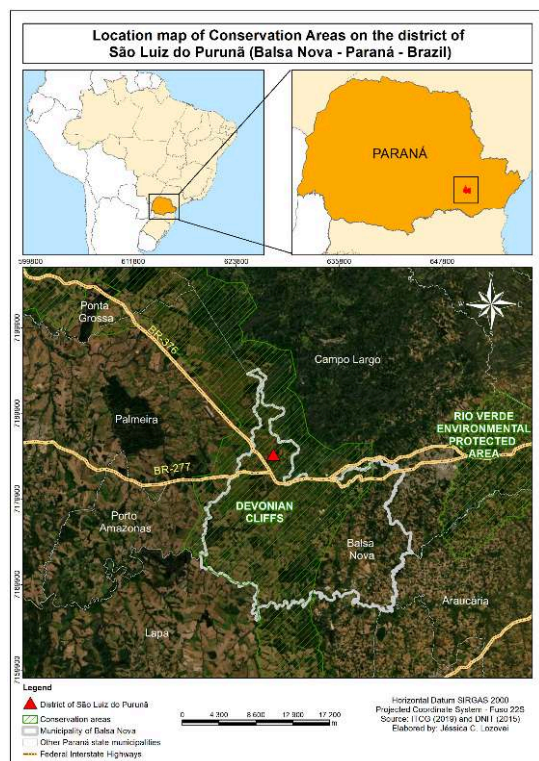


Author's photo, 2019

- 21 The equestrianism that is one of the town's defining traits harks back to the time when São Luiz was little more than a small agricultural settlement and way station on the *tropeiro* routes, which from the 17th until the mid-20th century used horses to move livestock (horses, mules and cattle) from the southern *pampa* grasslands north towards the major animal market of Sorocaba, in the state of São Paulo. This also firmly roots the town within the southern Brazilian equestrian culture that I spoke of earlier, which sprung up as part of ranching activities and persists to this day, in work and leisure

forms, making horses not only an economic asset but symbolic resource, an axis of cultural identity and, in the lives of the many women and men who keep them, both the object and subject of great passion (illustration 4).

Illustration 4. Map illustrating the district's location within an area of environmental protection



- 22 Some 70 years after the *tropeiro* route yielded to more modern forms of transportation and was banished to the realm of historical memory, São Luiz do Purunã has become known as “a tourism destination” – largely because of the way its history and the natural attractiveness of its landscapes, the dramatic geology of the highlands of the state’s “second plateau”, have been marketed. Its touristic appeal is largely a regional one, as neither Curitiba nor Ponta Grossa are on the map of Brazilian international tourism attractions. The community that stands today as one of the three districts that make up the municipality of Balsa Nova (12,000 inhabitants, approximately 40% of whom live in rural areas; Silveira, *et al.*, 2019) is home to a series of ‘new’ and ‘old’ social actors and agents, who live and work both together and apart.
- 23 Rafael Silva, a sociologist who spent most of his childhood and youth in the district, a native of its traditional community, has both “insider” and “outsider” insight into its transformation. He speaks (Silva, 2014, 2019) of how São Luiz’s connection to “mass tourism” emerged initially from within the community in the 1960s with a rodeo that became a regional and even national attraction, hence demonstrating the conversion of this “re-invented tradition” (Adelman and Becker, 2013) into a new kind of economic and social capital. A popular yearly event, in May 1998 it was cited by one of the state’s major newspapers as “the state’s biggest rodeo event” “expected to bring together 1,500 cowboys and over 100,000 spectators” and “successful because there is room there for people who want to ride horses and those who just like to party” (Viera, 1998). It had its last edition in 2003, after being evaluated by many members of the

community as detrimental to their well-being and way of life. The rodeo, bringing a huge influx of outsiders and a lot of cash into a town, left in its wake a population and place that remained largely idle and ‘unexploited’ until the following year. Some residents were resentful of the intensity of the partying, complaining about the impact of visitors who cared little about the community and its sustenance, nor about the “gaucho traditionalism” that had initially been its *raison d’être*. The festivities grew beyond the capacity of the townspeople to deal with them, causing not only infrastructure problems but – it was reported – crime, violence and discord among the town’s permanent residents (Silva, 2014).

- 24 Yet when the rodeo came to its abrupt halt, so too did the resources it generated. According to Silva, this helps to explain the strength that the notion of “tourism as our saviour” acquired within the local community (2014, p.63). In the 1990s, a horse enthusiast and businessman from Curitiba had become the first one to invest in a horse farm that doubled as a dude ranch (that is, catering to visitors and tourists desirous of a “ranching” or riding experience). His efforts were pioneering and others soon picked up on his cue: he had foreseen that the region that had drawn so much public attention through its rodeo might be an “ideal place” to commercialise the rural (Silva, 2014, p. 63).
- 25 Over the decades that followed, new businesses were started in the district, often by people from the outside who demoted the “natives”, whose ties to agriculture and animal husbandry had been weakened enough to oblige them, to seek employment at prevailing (low) wage levels (whether in cash crop production or as employees of horse businesses, in the industries of the region, or in tourism and other services). Furthermore, the locals found themselves face-to-face with urban middle-class entrepreneurs within an asymmetrical context, which rapidly reduced their chances of acquiring political power or influence. Yet they continued to enjoy and cultivate their lives as members of a horse-oriented community through a range of activities, including informal rodeo competitions (for locals, and with little pretension of forming part of professional rodeo circuits), engaging in local horse-trading deals, riding proudly around town in gaúcho gear – perhaps to show off a new horse! – and taking part in weekend *cavalgadas*. Changes and continuities were astutely perceived by my informant Dona Val, a woman in her early sixties, who – as we rode side by side on a ride in honour of International Women’s Day on 7th March 2020 – enthusiastically narrated a family story – how she, her husband and her children used to sojourn some twenty-five kilometres in a day to access the services they needed. “Now”, she said, “I ride these same roads with my grandchildren, for leisure!”

Can equestrian tourism favour local development?

- 26 The local authorities who saw tourism as a sort of panacea for the post-rodeo days in São Luiz, tended to assume that its development would unfold from the presence and efforts of hotel and resort owners, rather than from projects arising within the local population. The protagonism of urban entrepreneurs seeking, in turn, to attract an urban clientele as consumers of the natural heritage of the region was taken for granted. Members of the local community were increasingly turned into formal and informal sector workers for tourism establishments – stables, hotels and restaurants – and were expected to be grateful for the jobs. Workers from other settlements in the region also became a new presence in town, working for example in the construction

industry, and introducing the possibility for new tensions between “insiders and outsiders”.¹²

- 27 Although statistics specifically on São Luiz are not readily available, a report put together recently by Geography of Tourism students from our university (UFPR) attempts to reorganise existing aggregate data on the municipality of Balsa Nova, to which São Luiz belongs. They show that the native population of the region employed in industry, agriculture and services (health, education, tourism) with median average earnings clustered around the official federal minimum wage (Silveira *et al.*, 2019, p.100). The report also examines existing infrastructure and living conditions within the town, which include a public health clinic, a municipally-run elementary school and a state-run high school, both of which are located within São Luiz – right on its main streets – and attend to children and young people living in neighbouring parts of the municipality as well. In fact, to live on or near the town’s main streets is considered a privileged location for families, who thereby have easy (walking distance) access to educational and commercial services, which also include a local grocery store and a small supermarket.
- 28 Houses on the main streets are often simple and well-kept one story units, but there are several larger houses and a considerable amount of properties under construction. Moving further from the centre, attentive observers will also find a considerable amount of sub-standard housing, perhaps occupied by the aforementioned “outsiders” – people who have come to work in the town or district from other rural or semi-rural areas. Further still from the several cobblestone streets that make up the downtown, dirt roads lead to a more distant zone where charming resorts, ranches and horse farms can be found, as well as a cluster of fancy houses that are sometimes referred to as “mansions” (including one owned by a supreme court judge) and subdivisions in which the minimum amount of land that can be legally purchased for constructing a home or building is 20,000 square metres. This is the “new landscape” which summarises a recent history, behind which events and processes that marginalise traditional rural populations are lurking.
- 29 Yet, fortunately, there are new variables coming into the equation. One of them is the presence of a perhaps unusual actor, the NGO Instituto Purunã, founded in 2016, with the broad goal of promoting “sustainable development” within the district and the region, a project which the organisation purports to understand in environmental and social terms. Arguably a unique element, the NGO is the brainchild of (and is sponsored by) a wealthy philanthropist whose family is linked to one of the nation’s major broadcasting networks and who maintains a cattle ranch and a Crioulo horse farm in the region. During my visit to his ranch¹³, he told me that he felt it was his duty to contribute to socially and environmentally sound forms of community development. In an acknowledgement of how, economically and culturally, he and his family have benefitted from a rich equestrian culture and the workers upon whose backs a particular rural way of life is built and sustained, he referred not only to his interest in “preserving heritage” but also to providing opportunities for the children and youth of the region, recognising the way persistent social inequality hinders their life chances. In the NGO’s three years of existence, it has defined its own activities as occurring on three fronts – “strengthening public administration”, “empowering youth” and “promoting (local involvement in) business”. NGO staff have worked on environmental conservation, as well as initiating projects with São Luiz elementary and secondary

school students and community youth, meant to encourage awareness of self, other and social and ecological issues.¹⁴ Some of these youth are among the young people I have met and socialised with in equestrian settings – a fairly equal mixture of boys and girls, although it seems that the girls engage exclusively in leisure riding activities, rather than the paying barn jobs that the boys often take on as early as 13 or 14 years old.¹⁵ While it is hard to evaluate what impact their participation in NGO-sponsored projects has had on their aspirations, their real chances for furthering education and later making a livelihood within their communities depend on a complex web of external socioeconomic factors. University studies, as several of them told me, are logistically very hard to undertake, given family situations that oblige them to work and study at the same time, and the lack of reliable and rapid transportation that could make commuting possible.

Illustration 5. Girls and women from the community are visible participants in rides and in equine-oriented social life



Author's photo, 2019

- 30 The São Luiz community also has a neighbourhood association, set up recently to solidify their own position as autonomous social actors. People to whom I spoke within the community did not readily identify the NGO as sharing their interests; I sensed that there was prevailing suspicion, rather than antagonism. After all, the role that the NGO plays, an “outsider” from the point of view of a traditional community, must not initially be easy to understand. In geographic terms, the division which separates an “us” (the villagers, the people) from “them” (*os de cima*, those who live in the affluent zone) would not place the Institute – located in a renovated heritage home on one of the town’s main streets – in the latter category. Yet it refers clearly to the hotel and resort owners, and in general the middle-class urbanites who have bought properties, built houses and horse businesses in a part of the district which is several kilometres away and extends over a vast amount of terrain – largely lands which traditional

residents have been selling off, first to agro-business, but now increasingly taken over by real estate development.

- 31 During the two years of my participant observation, facilitated by my status as horse enthusiast boarding a horse of my own at one of the region's businesses,¹⁶ I have heard middle class business owners express their dissatisfaction with the thin flow of customers and opportunities. While some of the ranches and resorts have had more success in garnering a constant or faithful clientele, particularly those that host weddings and other weekend events, the number of visitors interested specifically in horses is said to be dropping. Furthermore, Brazil's currently unstable political and economic situation is an indirect bane to district business, as middle class and lower middle-class consumers experience a marked decline in their disposable income.
- 32 Some community-owned businesses (restaurant, supermarket, grocery store, new barber shop and ice-cream parlour) seem to be doing reasonably well. Furthermore, the local community hangs tenaciously on to its horse culture, which is reproduced inter-generationally. Most of the locals who are involved with horses are employees of the urban entrepreneurs, yet some have small informal sector businesses of their own, as horse traders and farriers who may even accept a boarder or two, and most importantly, keep horses of their own for family use. There is now a new locally owned *cabanha* (the Crioulista term for horse barn) which also functions, on weekends, as a restaurant and community gathering spot. And here is where the second noticeable change, or variable, comes into the picture. While, as mentioned above, the equestrian tourism activities fomented by "outsider" businesses seem to be having a hard time growing and expanding, I have, over my two years of ethnographic research, participated in what seems to be a new surge of community rides, organised by local residents and also attracting horse owners and riders from nearby communities. These are activities that promote equestrian-based friendships and social cohesion rather than being organised primarily for commercial purposes, although community businesses are benefitted by the drinks and meals sold at the end of the rides. People often lend horses to friends, neighbours and family members who are without a mount, and an occasional "outsider" who wants to rent a horse from a local is always welcome. In one ride I took part in in 2019, the number of men and women, boys and girls taking part numbered at least one hundred.
- 33 There also seems to be a growing regional interest in *eco-tourism* – hiking, biking and rock climbing –, which brings another group of "outsiders" into the district. These activities may very well have a broader appeal to urban residents than that of equestrianism. At the same time, the middle-class entrepreneurs specialising (not always exclusively) in horseback riding services would like to see their businesses grow. They depend on local labour with equestrian skills, and some make use of teenage boys, in addition to some older more experienced men who are probably registered (formal market) workers. Entrepreneurs are also interested in engaging government officials and programs (municipal, state, national) and some harbour the desire to become a part of international equestrian travel circuits, despite the aforementioned limitations posed by the fact that the closest metropolitan area, Curitiba, does not attract considerable numbers of foreign tourists. The traditional horse community, on the other hand, is lacking in the capitals – economic, social, cultural – and resources to cater to foreigners. Furthermore, their horizon is constructed at the level of local and regional equestrian culture and practice, engaging with their sense of community and

identity. This of course could change with younger generations, who through social media have had some access to a more globalised way of life, as well as social patterns in which rural and urban are drawn closer together.

- 34 It is also worth noting here that the routes taken on commercial and community rides are dependent primarily on the many kilometres of unpaved country roads that horsewomen and horsemen have at their disposal. There is little or no public land available for riding; although there is often private property that must be crossed in order to get close to the canyons, the major natural attraction of the region, and *fazendas* (estates) with mountainous trails and ridges, rivers and reforested areas (largely pine and Eucalyptus planted for sale to paper factories), can be enjoyed insofar as their owners have given riders permission to do so. The future of equestrian activity in the district is thus inextricably wed to land conservation policies and real estate practices.

In conclusion...

- 35 Thus, as we have seen, the small community of São Luiz do Purunã is a place where fundamental social relationships of new ruralities and the particular challenges of how to maintain Brazilian equestrian heritage are played out. In my brief exploration of how, in one particular case, equestrian tourism emerges as a factor in new equations for rural life and development, a particular configuration of social agents comes to the forefront. While urban entrepreneurs from outside the community provided an initial impulse to the development of tourism in São Luiz, some locals seem to be ‘catching on’ and even ‘cashing in’. Conflicts between groups involve immediate interests but also models for rural life and development. Certainly, upper-class business owners and land developers are driven by the profit motive, and people from the local community, who have a group identity of sorts and may very well be committed to group struggles for cultural, social, economic preservation, also have individual and familial projects of financial betterment. The NGO, Instituto Purunã, has made its purposes explicit, yet also engages with diverse sets of social actors, including local authorities; the latter, who in theory should be committed to “the common good”, are also politically motivated and linked to interest groups, such as businesses who pursue goals and lobby for interests of their own regarding regional development.
- 36 In São Luiz do Purunã, things may be taking an unusual turn. The presence of the “third sector”, whether or not widely accepted, seems to have had the effect of stimulating, amongst the local population, a new consciousness of themselves as actors and stakeholders. There appears to be some growth of new forms of protagonism within the local horse world, wherein some younger members of the community are able to put their “inherited equestrian capital” to work. It might be overly utopian or excessively optimistic to imagine the different segments finding constructive ways of working together, and the current situation, which at this writing has been taken over by the COVID-19 pandemic, hardly augurs well for small and medium sized businesses. Serious economic and political challenges lie ahead, but as things move forward, sound public policy on tourism will be more important than ever. Urgent tasks of environmental preservation – to which equestrian tourism does not necessarily contribute, but certainly can – must be faced head on. There must be recognition of popular Brazilian equestrian culture as a part of the nation’s heritage, and one which

deserves respect – especially for the working people and equines who keep it alive. Why not imagine projects for tourism in which tourists themselves come to learn about this equestrian heritage, as they “consume” it? Ultimately, these prospects speak to the way local struggles become integrated within larger societal projects.

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NOTES

1. Brazil follows USA, China and Mexico, according to data registering average stock 1994-2018: cf. <http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data/QA/visualize> (accessed on March 28th, 2020).
2. The so-called "Brazilian economic miracle", under the aegis of a military government was harshly developmentalist, environmentally ruthless and deeply unsettling for rural peoples. Among its consequences were the mass exodus of peasants and small farmers from the countryside, to the burgeoning slum areas in and around major metropolitan areas.
3. Rodeo sport linked to lucrative national and international circuits have been an exception, attracting attention through animal activists' claims against it (see Adelman and Bernava, 2019).
4. Equine-assisted therapy was recognised as a health profession in 2019, a measure which may help to take it beyond the realm of charity and make it available to patients through public and private health care programs.
5. The countryside has metamorphosised into a scenario of diversified activities, in which the tourism and leisure uses of groups who have disposable income can enjoy hotels and resorts, restaurants, spas, adventure sports – and even life in gated communities for city dwellers who are seeking security and urban amenities, alongside the beauty, tranquillity and 'healthier lifestyle' offered by living 'closer to nature'.
6. See Silva (2019) on contemporary patterns of "marketing the rural" in Southern Brazil.
7. The first systematic study of the Brazilian equine industry, putting together a valuable and statistically-oriented overview of equine and equestrian activities in the country, was carried out through a partnership between the Ministry of Agriculture and agronomists from the University of São Paulo, one providing an invaluable overview of the sector (Câmara, 2016).
8. I emphasise this as part of my argument on the relative bifurcation of the Brazilian equestrian world, between popular and entrepreneurial segments, which does not preclude their overlap and complex intersection. For example, members of the popular equestrian milieu may be able to

use their 'equestrian capital' to move up the social ladder, establishing their own successful businesses.

9. And it is also true that agro-business has had some success in rallying State support/recognition of rodeo as 'intangible heritage' – to the chagrin and resistance of animal rights groups (Adelman and Bernava, 2019).

10. Salazar and Graburn (2014) provide a fascinating discussion of the diverse motivations and quests that fuel tourism experiences in the contemporary world. Among them are those that defy or minimise conventional consumerist desires, seeking deeper forms of identification with other peoples, cultures and their practices.

11. Data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), as cited at: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%A3o_Luiz_do_Purun%C3%A3 (accessed 12/04/2020).

12. During my field work, townspeople occasionally identified these "outsiders" as responsible for crimes occurring in the region.

13. In 2019, I took part in a two-day workshop he sponsored there, linked to his "Mulheres na Doma" (Women in Horse-training) Project; in this case, it was a training clinic given by the most experienced of the women who had participated in his project, a young and highly skilled *crioulista* horsewoman from the southernmost state of Rio Grande do Sul.

14. www.institutopuruna.com.br

15. The teenage girls I have met in São Luiz may be excellent horsewomen, but the paid work I have seen them doing has been in feminised work, for example, helping their female relatives who cook and clean at local resorts. For more on the gender division of labour within the Brazilian equestrian sector, see Adelman and Costa (2017).

16. I spent almost two years as a boarder at a business owned by an urban professional who went into the horse business in São Luiz, but have recently moved my horse to a small, informal barn kept up by one of the "natives".

ABSTRACTS

Brazil is one of the world's "horse giants", home to the world's fourth largest equine population, and to a popular equestrian culture that has yet to be duly recognized as heritage. This culture, emerging from its historic link to cattle ranching and agriculture, is also reshaped by currently expanding sport and leisure uses of the horse. With a focus on the needs and predicaments of rural communities in which horses are an important symbolic and cultural resource – perhaps more than an economic one – I provide a description and discussion of my ethnographic research within the village of São Luiz do Purunã, located in a region of environmental protection in southern Brazil. As a case study that examines the different social actors involved in turistification processes, my research contributes to debates on the patrimonialisation of traditional equestrian culture, its promise and its contradictions.

Le Brésil est l'un des « géants du cheval », qui abrite la quatrième plus grande population équine du monde et une culture équestre populaire qui n'a pas encore été dûment reconnue comme patrimoine. Cette culture, provenant de son lien historique à l'élevage et à l'agriculture, est aussi refaçonée par le développement actuel du sport et des loisirs équestres. En me focalisant sur les besoins et les difficultés des communautés rurales, pour lesquelles le cheval est une ressource symbolique et culturelle importante – peut-être plus qu'économique –, je présente les résultats

d'une recherche ethnographique que j'ai menée dans le village de São Luiz do Purunã, localisé dans un espace protégé dans le sud du Brésil. En tant qu'étude de cas, interrogeant le rôle des différents acteurs sociaux investis dans le processus de touristification du village, mon analyse contribue à la réflexion relative à la patrimonialisation des cultures équestres, ses espoirs et contradictions.

INDEX

Mots-clés: culture équestre populaire, tourisme équestre, patrimoine, communautés rurales, chevaux au Brésil

Keywords: popular equestrian culture, equestrian tourism, heritage, rural communities, horses in Brazil

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